

Completing the Application: Guidance to Candidates applying for posts at Officer Level and above

These notes are intended to help you present your application so that we understand how closely you fit what we are looking for. Please read the guidance carefully and refer to it as you complete the application form.

SECTION A

Personal details

We ask whether you are related to current staff, tenants and Board members because housing associations are legally required to identify and record this information, to prevent any suspicion of favouritism. Being related to staff, tenants or Board members does not prevent you from being employed with us – but failure to disclose such a relationship would do so. If in doubt, ask us.

References

We are looking for employment references, not character references. Please ensure that your referees are your two most recent employers, including your current employer if you are employed now. It would be better not to have both referees from the same employer, although we recognise that sometimes this will be the case where a candidate has worked for an employer for a long time. We do not want references from relatives, close friends and partners. If your current or previous employer happens to be a relative, close friend or partner, please say so, so that we can discuss with you whether to approach someone else for a reference instead. Make sure that you give the employment address of your referees, not their home address. We are seeking their reference in their capacity as a representative of your current or past employer, not as a private individual. When we ask what your relationship to the referee is, this is in a professional capacity, e.g. line manager, rather than any other context.

We will take up references only when we have decided to make an offer of employment. If there is some reason why you are concerned about the reference you might get from one of your last two employers, we will be happy to discuss that with you before approaching them. However, we will not make an offer of employment if we are unable to confirm the information you have given about your most recent employment.

If you have not previously held two jobs, or if they were a long time ago, or if you have been in education or doing voluntary work rather than paid employment, we will be happy to take references from (for example) an educational establishment or a voluntary group instead as long as you clearly explain the situation.

SECTION C

Education and Training

We only want summary information about the exams you took at school – the number of exams passed, at which level or grade. For example, if you list “Higher Grade” in

column 2, we would expect you to put “4 including maths and English” in column 3. We don’t want a full list of all your exams and grades. If you think that one or more of the exams you passed in school is especially relevant to the post you are applying for, you can say so in the section about your suitability for the post.

Under further education, if you have a qualification which does not obviously correspond to well known levels like HNC or degree (for example the level of some qualifications gained in another country may not be obvious to us), please explain what level qualification it is.

SECTION D

Employment

We sometimes find that it is unclear whether someone is in permanent or temporary work. We don’t have a view about one type of work being better than another, but we do want to understand your employment history, so we ask specifically about this.

Under previous employment, we want a full picture. Don’t leave any unexplained gaps. If you have had periods of unemployment, or if you have been out of the employment market for any significant time for whatever reason, please make sure that this is clear – it won’t prevent you from being appointed, but it might be something we want to discuss at interview.

SECTION E

Additional Information

This is the most important section of the application form, and it is crucial that you understand what we are looking for so that you can present your application in the best way. If you don’t try to address what we are looking for, it is highly unlikely that you will be shortlisted. If you send a CV instead of doing what we ask here, you certainly won’t be shortlisted.

The basis on which we shortlist is the person specification. This sets out what we think are the essential and desirable features of the type of person we are looking for. When we shortlist, we are trying to decide to what extent you have demonstrated that you meet the essential requirements of the post and, to a lesser extent, the desirables.

The key word here is *demonstrated*. There is a big difference between claiming something, and demonstrating it. For example, if we say that we are looking for experience of staff management, how might you deal with this? One applicant might say “I have 15 years experience of managing up to 30 staff and have always been seen as a good manager”. That might sound like a strong answer to some people, but in fact it doesn’t tell us very much. On the other hand, someone might say “I have 3 years experience of managing a team of four people, and I deal with recruitment, supervision and appraisal. I have had to deal with disciplinary and grievance issues and I prepared material for a case at employment tribunal, though I did not attend the hearing. I have had to tackle problems of poor motivation, and have been undertaking teambuilding activities over the last year”. On the face of it, they have less experience, but in fact they have given a far stronger answer, because they have explained more about what they have done and allowed us to understand just what their experience is.

Be careful about claiming experience. The point about experience is that it's only valuable when it involves learning, not serving time. If you've done something for a long time, it doesn't mean that your experience is as wide as someone who has done it for a far shorter period – it depends on the range of things you have done and what you have learned from it. Taking the above example again, being nominally in charge of many staff who in practice manage themselves and don't create any management challenges is not as valuable experience as managing fewer staff for a shorter time where there are more problems to deal with. So tell us about your experience, not just how long you did it for.

Following on from this point, we should stress that we will not read things into your application that aren't there. If something is in your current job description, it doesn't mean you actually do it. And if you do it, it doesn't mean you do it well – you need to show with reference to real examples that you have done something successfully, not just say so. Many applications fall down on this, because people think they can just claim something rather than demonstrating it.

We also want to know what *you* have done and what part *you* played. If you just say that you were part of a project team that implemented a £4 million IT strategy, we don't know if you were leading the team, or playing a more minor role. What was your part, what were you responsible for?

We ask you to address each point of the person specification in turn. This is because it is much easier for us to understand whether someone meets our requirements if they set out their application in this way.

If you just write a general account of why you think you are suited to the job, it is very likely that you won't address everything we are looking for. And if you do it in random order, we may easily miss something you say that relates to an earlier point we thought was finished with. If your form is hard to follow and goes all over the place, you will certainly not set out your case to best advantage.

You may think there are some parts of the person specification that you don't meet. You might want to think about whether you have acquired this experience or demonstrated this skill other than in paid employment – maybe in voluntary work, on an educational assignment, or in your private life. If so, put it down. But if you really don't meet part of the person specification, don't make it up. If there are one or two areas where you don't meet what we are looking for, we can consider whether your other strengths suggest that we should see you anyway. If there are many areas where you don't fit what we are looking for, you should consider carefully whether to apply.

Finally, it helps the panel if you follow these instructions. It will take you longer than some applications you may have done in the past, but it's the best way for us – and you – to assess whether you meet enough of our requirements for an interview. If you need assistance with your application, or if you want to ask about anything, contact the HR Department on 0131 317 7227.

Thank you for your interest in the Association.

Revised May 2006